

**Education Committee
Testimony Regarding
HB 6759 An Act Concerning Early Childhood
March 1, 2023**

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and Distinguished member of the Education Committee:

My name is Mary Cecchinato and I am the Director of the Torrington Child Care Center a state funded Child Day Care Center (CDC) in Torrington. I am the co-chair of the State Funded Child Care Center Director's Forum, a statewide network of 102 early care and education centers serving over 4,000 infants, toddlers, and three- and four-year-old children. These Centers were established in 1968 by state statute to provide high quality child care for low income working families in approximately 63 cities and towns in CT.

I want to thank you for recognizing in section 1 of this bill that compensation for early educators is the issue facing the early care and education sector. The rapid increase in entry level wages throughout the economy has left early care programs struggling to retain and attract staff.

My center is mandated to have teachers with BA or AA degrees, as we are state funded. We received a very minimal increase last year which did not cover the new minimum wage. Our staff have Baccalaureate and Associate degrees in Early Childhood Education and do not get compensated for the quality work they perform every day. I have been the Executive Director of the Torrington Child Care Center for 36 years. This past year we have had the highest staff turnover than ever before. We cannot keep up with the competitive wages due to flat funding and having no sustainable increases. As the results of the COVID pandemic, the increase in minimum wage, our payroll has gone from \$419,912.05 in 2015 to \$550,087.98 in 2022. This increase in pay was only made possible because of the PPP loan and aid that was provided due to the pandemic. The increase is a little over 17,000.00 which is about \$1,133.33 increase per staff and out of that we need to pay the tax liabilities. Families cannot afford to pay more for childcare and the State Funded programs cannot increase fees due to a mandatory fee scale. Even with the funding from the State, we do not bring in enough "sustainable" funding to offer our degreed teachers the higher wages they deserve.

What is missing from this bill is the way in which this will be paid. I urge you to support increased funding for the state funded early care programs and the creation of a wage equity fund similar to what was created in Washington DC to increase wages for early educators without adding to the child care cost burden that families already face.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

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